

# Tennis Wellness Life

The examples of professional athlete's dedication to their overall well being, physically and mentally, are brought to our collective attention at every turn. No, not the ones who've been convicted of illegal performance enhancing drug use and stripped of their medals, trophies and prize money, or the ones under constant surveillance who employ private chemists to remain one step ahead of the enforcement agencies and beat their drug tests. Not that.

I am referring to the trendsetters who have embraced legitimate, above board regimens and protocols, off the playing field, which have steadily mainstreamed in the past few years. Not only into the lifestyles of motivated weekday and weekend warriors, but also into the lives of those who might be without a particular sport but are committed to their head-to-toe health, fitness and longevity.

Tennis players in particular, of any age, are a very physical, dedicated and in tune with their bodies bunch due to the obvious demands of the game. Nancy Stout, 84 years young, is currently ranked in the top 10 internationally (ITF) in the women's over 80 singles category. She regularly treks down from Sarasota to Punta Gorda for on-court training sessions to help keep her edge. But, regarding her off-court cross training, she said, "It's the regular Pilates that really keeps my tennis going." And she is amazingly injury free despite a demanding year-round schedule of national and international events along with constant practice.

Yoga, much like Pilates, has also found its way out of the studios and into the lifestyles of tennis players looking to enhance the physicality of their games. Punta Gorda-based USPTA tennis pro Margit Bannon, who is also a certified yoga instructor, has uniquely merged the two with glowing testimonials from local players.

Tennis itself has been on the cutting edge of human performance development for some time. Tennis legend Martina Navratolova, once a chubby, mercurial tour rookie, albeit with immense talent, fully realized her potential only after adopting a holistic, far ahead of its time approach to excellence back in the early 1980's. Team Navratolova included a fitness trainer for speed, flexibility and endurance, a dietician to properly fuel herself, a coach to fine tune

her skills and strategies, and a sports psychologist to foster a new mental toughness component. The rest is history.

Along with Ivan Lendl on the men's side, she influenced an entire generation of tennis players at all levels, exemplified in spades by pros Novak Djokovic and Mardy Fish in 2011. The "Djoker," who finished the year as the best player on the planet, achieved as much notoriety for his gluten-free diet as he did for his stellar play. A previously often-injured Fish, a good but not elite player, became a top 10 player in one season at age 30, old for a tour pro, as a result of better fitness and diet. Relatively same playing skills, very different results.

In today's increasingly health minded, aging boomer society, the term "holistic" has given way to "wellness," a lifestyle trend that has become far more reaching.

The Starwood's Hotel chain broke new ground at last year's U.S. Open by awarding rewards program members with free lessons with former top 5 touring pro James Blake right at Flushing Meadows. That beats a free room any day if you're into improving your game.

And large metro area client service movers and shakers are now foregoing the traditional schmoozing tactic of lunches, dinners and cocktails in an increasingly more health conscious marketplace. "People are tired of boozing it up with clients," according to New York City's SoulCycle founder Julie Rice. "Businesses are looking to engage their clients in new and healthy ways." Working out with clients is now referred to as "sweatworking." Keith Ferazzi, a how-to-book author on networking, believes workouts in any venue are ideal for closing deals and winning new accounts by "accelerating personal relationships" while becoming healthier at the same time.

It's all changing and simultaneously becoming both more sophisticated and diverse. In their book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Stanford psychologists Carol Dweck and Greg Walton argue that willpower is not, as previously thought, solely dependent on biological factors, mainly glucose depletion. Their control group studies, with fellow psychologist Veronika Job, indicate that willpower is self-renewing; when "you work hard, you're energized to work more." Proper food and rest are a given, but now willpower is being



recognized as being mostly in your head. That reminds me of the old adage: "If you want to get something done, give it to a busy person."

Another side of the emerging multi-sided wellness coin is a heightened biochemical interest among researchers and wellness doctors in how aging individuals deficient in vitamin B12 may exhibit slowly entrenching symptoms aside from an obvious anemia diagnosis that any blood test will flag. "Muscle weakness, fatigue, shakiness, unsteady gait, mood disorders, low blood pressure and cognitive problems" are being recognized as related. This deficiency — our body's ability to absorb vitamin B12 from food is severely diminished as we age — could seriously affect anyone, particularly a tennis player's longevity and effectiveness above and below the neck.

Thankfully, what has, in part, conversely emerged from the win-at-all-costs pro sports drug culture, where large amounts of money and personal cache are at stake and cheating by injection and ingestion has been perceived by some as a necessity to be competitive, are above-board programs, developed and administered by forward thinking doctors focused on prevention and promoting a physical and mental enhancement that best represents "wellness" as we know it today.

One of those innovators is Dr. Grant Mansell, founder of Life Logic Wellness for Life serving individuals and couples in Charlotte and Lee County. Since aging systematically reduces hormone levels, a foundation of his program is the restoration of those hormones to one's previous more beneficial levels. Complete resignation to "normal aging" is no more. It can be successfully treated through not only

hormone therapy, but diet, exercise and effective supplementation collectively aimed at checking one's advancing chronological clock in order to maintain a "vigorous, healthy, and youthful lifestyle" for men and women.

As a still effectively functioning career tennis pro — one with a Medicare card in my back pocket I might add — I thankfully continue to be able to physically outperform my peers, thanks in large measure to embracing a wellness program. By maintaining good muscle tone, keeping the energy up, watching the body fat, staying sharp and paying attention to reducing the risk of age related disease, I'm cognizant of striving to stay ahead of the aging curve.

Whatever you do, whoever you are — tennis player, golfer, runner, swimmer, walker, bridge player — it makes sense that going the extra mile will make a difference in your body-mind self. A wellness lifestyle is the new countermeasure to old-aging versus succumbing to what senior care specialists now refer to as becoming "the old old." ■■■



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